

Public Health in a Nursing School

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MANY PEOPLE, both those concerned with public health nursing and those concerned with nursing education, have long felt that the curriculums of most 3-year schools of nursing leave a great deal to be desired concerning the community aspects of health and disease. In many schools of nursing the curriculum includes little or nothing concerning either the family aspects of illness or community health agencies other than the hospital and its staff.

In Butler County, Pa., the faculty of a 3-year school of nursing and the staff of the county health department are working together to integrate public health into the curriculum of the nursing school.

Background

The Butler County Memorial Hospital, established in 1896, was expanded in 1954 from approximately 200 beds to 300 beds. It is the only general hospital resource in Butler County, which has a population of approximately 103,000. The school of nursing was established in 1903.

The Butler County Health Department was established January 1, 1954, as the first county health department in Pennsylvania. In 1952,

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in anticipation of the establishment of the county health department, the Pennsylvania Department of Health had assigned public health personnel to Butler County. These personnel functioned as a State-administered local health district until the establishment of the county health department. The personnel of the State unit included a medical director, public health nurses, sanitarians, and clerical workers. After the formation of the county health department, the public health nursing staff was increased, additional sanitarians were employed, and a public health engineer and a public health educator were added to the staff.

During the 2 years from 1952 to 1954, while the public health program in the county was State-administered, the public health nursing staff and the faculty of the hospital's school of nursing began to work closely together. The faculty of the nursing school invited the director of public health nursing and staff nurses to participate in the instructional program of the school. The invitation was eagerly accepted. As the two groups worked together, each group became convinced that the curriculum of the school could be greatly enriched and the experience of the students could be greatly broadened by incorporating into the curriculum a community approach to health and disease.

In 1954, after a series of conferences between health department personnel and the nursing school faculty, it was concluded that experiences in community health for the nursing students could be incorporated into the curriculum. The administration of the hospital authorized the educational director and the medical-surgical instructor of the nursing school to

work with the medical director and director of nursing of the county health department to plan and organize such a revision of the curriculum.

First-Year Curriculum

The purpose of the curriculum revision was defined as "to enrich the student nurses' program of study by the integration of principles of public health and the social aspects of nursing into the total plan of instruction." Under this purpose, health department personnel planned with the faculty of the school of nursing to accomplish the following objectives:

- To provide experience for students in the team approach to problem solving.
- To demonstrate to students social and health problems of families in the home.
- To review course outlines and to provide instructors with teaching materials, references, and public health information in all areas where these could be adapted to the course.
- To set up in the course on sociology special health centered projects for students.
- To demonstrate home nursing visits to students using discharged patients with whom the student had worked in the hospital.
- To assist students in preparing case studies and in participating in class and ward discussions.
- To demonstrate the importance of continuity of patient care, social and emotional factors in relation to health and disease, and the role of the nurse in understanding the patient as an individual in relation to his family and the community.

After these objectives had been set, it was agreed that they could not be met unless the teaching personnel of the school, the hospital supervisors, and the head nurses themselves understood the objectives and had participated in the experiences which the students would be undergoing. Therefore, with the approval of the hospital administration, administrative supervisors, head nurses, and nursing school faculty who had not had previous public health experiences were each assigned to the health department full time for 2 weeks. This experience acquainted them with the health department, with community health problems,

and with the organizations, agencies, and community resources working with these problems.

While this program of experience for the instructional personnel was in process, detailed planning of the curriculum for the students was carried on. It was agreed that students should be introduced to the health department during their first week in school and even before their orientation to the various divisions of hospital nursing. This introduction was provided by a class visit to the health department, during which the work of the department and its relationship to community health programs were discussed by the medical director, director of public health nurses, director of environmental health, and public health educator.

The health educator then introduced the students to group discussion methods. A series of discussions was held, with the class divided into small groups. These discussions had the dual purpose of further developing the students' concept of community health and of providing an opportunity for them to develop skills in group discussion methods, skills which would be useful to them later in ward conferences and case discussions following visits to families in their homes.

During the course entitled "Introduction to the Medical Sciences," arrangements were made for each student nurse to spend a half day with a public health nurse visiting families in their homes. Observation experience in environmental health was also provided by having students spend another half day in field work with health department sanitarians. The course instructor prepared the way for these visits by advance discussion with the class and by providing a written guide for the student nurses to use in making observations. It was hoped that these visits would give the student some conception of what illness means to the family and the community as well as to the patient.

The next step in the program was to integrate public health into the course in "Medical-Surgical Nursing." The course instructor presented disease entities as community problems, and students studied some of the ways in which illness affects the community and ways in which community problems affect illness. Here again, in carefully selected cases, the student nurse accompanied the public health nurse

on home visits. In some instances, these visits were made to patients who had been discharged from the hospital, and the student observed how the public health nurse conducted health teaching in the home. In other instances, an attempt was made to provide observation home visits to types of cases which the student was not likely to see in the hospital.

Following these home visits, the student nurse reported her experiences to the class. The public health nurse helped the student with the preparation of these case studies, and a member of the staff of the health department attended the class presentations and case discussions.

This concluded the experiences of the first year in the integration of public health into the nursing school curriculum.

Results of First Year

At the end of the first year a meeting was held with the hospital administration, the advisory board of the school of nursing, the faculty of the school, and the personnel of the health department to evaluate the year's experience. This evaluation emphasized the following points:

- The reaction of the head nurses and supervisors who had spent a 2 weeks' orientation period in the health department was universally enthusiastic. Their consensus was that they had had a rich learning experience. Not only did they feel that the instructional program for student nurses had been enhanced but that they themselves were able to provide a higher quality of nursing service than formerly. They had developed a greater awareness of the hospital patient as a member of a family and of a community and of the community resources available to meet individual and family health needs.

- The faculty of the school felt that the interest, response, and motivation of the student nurses was very gratifying. The students, too, had developed a concept of the relationship of health and disease in individuals to family and community problems, a concept which previous classes had not developed. Their interest in the patients with whom they worked had been increased by seeing them in the frame of reference of the family and the community.

- The number of referrals of hospital patients to the public health nursing service had been greatly increased. This was particularly apparent in the areas of maternal and child health and adult health or chronic disease, fields in which the health department was anxious to expand its activities. Referrals to each of these public health nursing services more than doubled. The quality of referrals also greatly improved in the sense that cases selected for referral were increasingly those for which public health nursing might be expected to provide help. This was partly the result of the desire of the hospital staff to provide additional teaching materials for the student nurses in the form of more patients for them to visit with public health nurses. But it was also felt that the increase in the number and quality of referrals resulted in large measure from the increased sensitiveness of the head nurses and supervisors to patient needs and to the potentialities of public health nursing.

- The reaction of the medical staff of the hospital to the program was excellent. In many instances, they had become aware of and made use of community resources which they had not before appreciated or used. This was reflected in part by an increase of more than 20 percent in referrals by physicians to the public health nursing service.

Extension to Third-Year Curriculum

With the gratifying results of this experience during the nursing students' first year, a plan was developed to incorporate the community aspects of nursing into the remainder of the curriculum. Since the students spend most of their time away from the local hospital in other affiliated institutions during their second year, attention was directed to the third year of the nursing course.

During this year, the first approach to the integration of public health into the nursing school curriculum was made through the students' experience in obstetrical nursing. The existing system of referrals of obstetrical patients to the public health nursing service from the practicing obstetricians and from the hospital obstetrical service made this integration easier. Here again, the first step was to

provide the obstetrics instructor with an opportunity for field observation and experience with the health department. This experience included accompanying the public health nurse on home visits to patients receiving prenatal and postpartum care.

The experience of the student nurses also included visits to prenatal patients whom they would later see in the hospital on the obstetrical service, and visits in the home to mothers and babies whom they had cared for in the hospital. These visits were followed by case studies and class discussions, with health department staff participating. In preparation for the observation home visits with the public health nurse, the instructor provided the students with a written guide such as had been provided the first year students.

The students also participated in teaching classes of prospective parents, which are held on a continuing basis by the health department in cooperation with the nursing and medical staff of the hospital.

This is the extent to which the integration of public health into the curriculum of the Butler County Memorial Hospital School of Nursing has proceeded. It is the hope of both health department staff and nursing school faculty that this integration can proceed much further and that the participation of the health department in the instructional program of the nursing school can be expanded. An outpatient department will be developed in the hospital within the near future, and it is planned to take advantage of the opportunity which expanded clinical services will provide for instruction in community health.

Both the hospital and the health department feel that their effectiveness as community health agencies has been greatly improved. The hospital is producing graduate nurses who have a better concept of community health needs and resources. At the same time, patient care has

in many instances been improved by continuity of care between home and hospital. The health department has been able to expand services in certain areas of community need and its service to individual families has been improved by the close relationship to the hospital nursing staff. This is, however, a demanding program on health department staff. It is time-consuming and at times disruptive of service program organization. Nevertheless, it is felt that the ultimate contribution to community health is well worth the time and effort.

Summary

An experience in the integration of public health into the curriculum of a 3-year school of nursing has been described. Through the cooperative efforts of the Butler County [Pa.] Health Department and the faculty of the Butler County Memorial Hospital School of Nursing, with the sanction and support of the hospital administration, a plan was developed and carried out for providing student nurses with experiences in the community aspects of health and disease. This began with providing 2 weeks of full-time experience in the health department for hospital supervisors and head nurses. The nursing students' experiences included introduction to community health agencies, observation field visits with public health nurses and other health department staff, demonstrations in the continuity of medical and nursing care both before and after the patient's hospital stay, and case studies and discussions. These experiences were accompanied by a review of the curriculum and the planning of individual courses in such a way as to emphasize the interrelationships between individual patients, the family, and the community. Although this is a time-consuming program for the health department staff, it is believed that it pays substantial dividends in improved nursing service for the community.